DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 089 272 CS 201 041

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TITLE New Orleans Cuisine: "Hamlet" to Bubble Gum.
PUB DATE Nov 73
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (63rd, Philadelphia, November 22-24, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescent Literature; *Elementary Education; *Paperback Books; Reading Ability; Reading Instruction; Reading Interests; Reading Level; Reading Materials; *Reading Material Selection; Student Motivation; *Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

Paperback publications are an ideal way to supplement the adopted textbook series of the New Orleans Public Schools or to provide common reading materials for special courses or for special students in special schools. Though established guidelines are helpful in making decisions about what books should be read by students, there is no system-wide prescriptive graded reading list for teachers to make "safe" selections from. Therefore, the teacher should read widely, in order to make his own booklist, and should guide the student's out-of-class reading experiences according to the student's abilities in reading areas where he will be motivated to read further. A teacher might plan a unit using adolescent literature by giving the students a voice in the planning. For example, the class might come up with a list of adolescent problems. The teacher can then seek titles that provide insights into these problems, seek materials with a variety of reading levels, and seek materials of varying degrees of maturity. Another way to use paperbacks is through minicourse programs. If the student can become "hooked on books" in elementary school, he may have a more successful academic career ahead of him. (HOD)

C 14 Adolescent Literature

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New Orleans Cuisine: Hamlet to Bubble Gum

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Away down in the bayou country in foggy, soggy New Orleans, at mealtime one is faced with some difficult decisions to make. What about Creole jambalaya, file gumbo, trout amandine, oysters Rockefeller, crayfish bisque, pompano en papillote or just plain "soul food" and cornbread? It all depends. If one would choose Antoine's or Galatoire's, one would find himself in an old, established atmosphere with a predominantly white clientele. If one would choose Dooky Chase or Chez Helene, one would find himself in a completely different ethnic atmosphere with a predominantly black clientele. At Brennan's one would find an amalgam of the modern and the Creole plus something individual and a fairly integrated clientele. If one chooses the Hummingbird Cafe, the small neighborhood restaurant just around the corner from the office, one would be mining the mother lode indeed -- the best red beans and rice in town, huge chunks of cornbread, and delicious chicory coffee, with the clientele including hard hats and policemen and secretaries and school board personnel, both black and white.

In nearly all the restaurants one can find uniquely local items -- the bisques, turtle soup, gumbo, shrimp, trout or oysters -- but it is the chefs in those establishments who make the exciting, highly individual differences. So one chooses to go to Antoine's for oysters Rockefeller and trout amandine, to Galatoire's for baked eggplant stuffed with shrimp, to Brennan's for stuffed flounder and bananas Foster, to Commander's Palace for crab meat imperial, to Kolb's for weiner schnitzel and Eva's kiss cake, or to Chez Helene for real Southern fried chicken or "soul food." Analagously, schools in New Orleans treat the menu

staples of the English content, concepts, skills and attitudes uniquely, individualizing the treatment in a manner pleasing to and successful with its clientele. The range of student abilities is just as wide as the distance from oysters Rockefeller to red beans and rice. The range of choices in reading materials offered to students must be equally extensive -- from Hamlet to "bubble gum lit."

In the news much has been written about adolescence the last several years -- the problems with parents, the lack of complete freedom, the lack of motivation for achievement, the war protest movement, the civil rights and women's lib movements, the problem of maturity, and perhaps the most important of all, the problem of problem solving. Hamlet's problem, reduced to basics, fits into several of these modern categories. He certainly had a problem with his parents. He certainly had a problem with maturity -- thirty years' old or no. He certainly had a problem with problem solving -- "indecisive" is one of the adjectives most commonly used to describe Hamlet. The universality of these elements in Hamlet has seldom been questioned, nor has the level of reading achievement necessary to translate Elizabethan speech nor has the maturity to understand the character been underestimated. Experienced educators, however, would agree that not all students have the reading skills and the mature insight to understand the nuances of the Shakespearean play. In New Orleans we find increasingly that large numbers of students who come to study with us have little motivation to read at all -- much less to translate Shakespeare. Today's students seem to be "today" oriented, and understandably so.

If one were to put literature on a continuum correlating skills/maturity/Shakespeare at one end, one would find at the opposite end of that continuum lack of skill/immaturity/bubble gum literature. The wide range of teen-age, young adult paperback books published each year would fall into place all along that continuum. It has been our experience in the New Orleans public schools that paperback publications are an ideal way to supplement the adopted textbook series or to provide common reading materials for special courses or for special students in special schools. Even Hamlet -- especially in the edition which places the footnotes on the page opposite the text -- seems more readable in paperback where a student feels free to underline unfamiliar words or scribble question marks in the margins where points occur which need to be clarified in class discussion.

Let us look for a moment at the New Orleans public schools. There are approximately 104,000 students in 136 schools. Approximately 70 percent of those students is black. All of the parish public schools have an integrated faculty as well as an integrated student body. Standardized tests -- however inaccurately they measure whatever it is they measure -- tell us that a large percentage of our students is of average or below-average ability and is reading below grade level. If one looks back at the Hamlet-bubble gum continuum described earlier, one could expect to find the larger percentage of students approaching the bubble gum end. Can we justify rigid tradition-bound courses with these achievement and ability levels? Another pertinent statistic is this one -- 87 percent of the young people in Louisiana never

graduate from college. How should these facts be taken into account in planning English instruction? One of the answers has been paperback bubble gum lit. Consistent with a state textbook policy, a teacher may not supplant the textbook adopted for the course she teaches. She cannot require a student to purchase a book that is or may be considered basic to a course. The teacher, however, is expected to individualize instruction to meet the needs of her pupils. Consequently, these guidelines have been given to teachers:

What NOT to Read:

Classics merely because they are classics.
New books merely because they are new.
Any book in questionable taste (e.g., book containing explicit "gutter talk" or explicit sex)
Any book a teacher feels herself too inexperienced to cope with from a public pressure point.

What to Read:

The book selected should be part of a developing program, not read without relevance to teacher goals.
The book should be appropriate to student's maturity level.
The book should be appropriate to student's ability level.
The book should be well written or have literary merit, though not necessarily "great literature."
(The teacher should ALWAYS avoid titles regularly taught on other grade levels as a matter of policy.)

Teachers have found these guidelines extremely helpful in making decisions about what books should be read by their particular students. There is no system-wide prescriptive graded reading list for teachers to make "safe" selections from. The teacher is expected to guide the student's out-of-class reading experiences, according to the student's abilities, in reading areas where he will be motivated to read further. In the absence of an approved list, the teacher does well to read widely in order to make her

own book list. I agree wholeheartedly with Tom Barton's statement (p864) in the September English Journal that an English teacher ought to read a minimum of fifty-two books a year, one-third of them adolescent literature. Precise knowledge of adolescent books will enable the teacher to recommend books to students which she has already read. She would never assign a book beyond the student's ability. Not all students need to read Hamlet. No student's best interest is served by attempting to fit his stock of abilities and teen-age insecurities into a curricular Procrustean bed where his "literary heritage" is his only reading and an elevated literary writing style of sorts the only written form acceptable to a particular teacher. Are we settling for too much less if our aim is to "hook students on books" (to use Dr. Daniel Fader's phrase) (Hooked on Books, Berkley) so that a life-long reading habit may result? Are we settling for too much less if our aim is to generate honest written responses to literature rather than the papers about literature frequently assigned by the traditionally oriented teacher? We find that in a well-planned composition program even the bubble gum lit students write more than adequate responses to a piece of writing if they are allowed to respond in a writing style with which they feel comfortable.

One might ask how to go about planning a unit using adolescent literature. First of all, the teacher would want to give the students a voice in the planning. Suppose one takes the area of student problems as the subject of a teaching unit. One might follow this procedure. Begin with a brainstorming

session in which the students name within a time limit every kind of adolescent problem they can think of and list those problems on the board. Then, through discussion, the class combines like problems, arriving, finally, at the five most serious problems facing adolescents today, according to those students. The teacher (who has done her homework) then would do a "book sell" showing the books and giving a brief review of each. The students decide which individual titles each will read. After the books have been read, presentation of each book by a small group would touch in some depth whatever points the teacher and the group had decided upon. There are few elements of the novel which one cannot teach using bubble gum lit as a tool rather than "the classics." The teacher might include in a problems unit such books as these: Ox:The Story of a Kid at the Top (John Ney, Bantam); Drop-Out (Jeannette Eyerly, Berkley); The Outsiders (S.E. Hinton, Dell); Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack! (M.E. Kerr, Dell); A Long Way Home From Troy (Donia Mills, Bantam); The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds (Paul Zindel, Bantam); Escape from Nowhere (Jeannette Eyerly, Berkley); and Go Ask Alice (Anonymous, Avon). Having determined with and from the class those problems students have to cope with, the teacher seeks titles that provide insights to the problems, a variety of reading levels, and material of varying degrees of maturity. In this listing of titles are included one easy-to-read book, one difficult-to-read book, and several books of average difficulty. These books deal with the teen-age problems of too much money, alcoholic parents, drugs, loneliness, dropping out of school, gang membership, and the generagion gap. One book

deals tangentially with sex. The teacher's having read eight titles on a single, loosely knit theme enables the students to choose five titles which will be best suited to their needs or interests. Common reading for the unit would be one or more selections from the textbook. Four of the titles suggested require maturity for understanding and should be suggested only to students who are in ninth grade or above. Additional titles might also be placed in this group -- titles suitable even for the least mature seventh grader as well as the others, such as: Harlem Summer, (Mary Vroman, Berkley); Jazz Country (Nat Hentoff, Dell); The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou (Kristin Hunter, Avon); Edgar Allan (John Neufeld, Signet); and The Contender (Robert Lipsyte, Bantam). A wide variety of titles is available compatible to the abilities and interests of every student. Many of these same titles could just as easily be selected for units on jazz music or sports or black studies or the problem of coming to maturity. One should be cautious about one's selections. Some books published for the teen-age market aim more for sensationalism and cash than to teach discrimination in taste and formation of a lifetime reading habit. The teacher should NEVER assign a book she has not read.

In the "problems" unit I did not include any of the teen-age "sex" books, such as Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones (Ann Head, Bantam); Phoebe (Patricia Dizenzo, McGraw Hill); A Girl Like Me (Jeannette Eyerly, Berkley); or Joy in the Morning (Betty Smith, Bantam). These books treat the theme of teen-age pregnancy and/or early marriage in a very tasteful way which neither glorifies nor moralizes. A relatively new book Bonnie Jo, Go Home (Jeannette

Eyerly, Bantam) tells the story of seventeen-year-old Bonnie Jo's pregnancy and the problems she runs into trying to have the abortion one of her parents wishes.

Subject matter like this, of course, brings us to censorship. Certainly the parents of some of the students would be calling our Superintendent of Schools away from his dinner if they discovered these paperbacks among school texts to be read for English assignments. Other parents apparently do not care at all what their student reads, just so long as he reads. The teacher's own good judgment, her knowledge of her students and their background, her experience and maturity, plus the guidelines already given have served us well in New Orleans. Censorship has never been a problem. Never? Well, hardly ever -- as Gilbert and Sullivan would say.

Not every unit would be about student problems. Every student has a problem or knows someone with a problem, and so I chose this common subject matter to serve as an example of planned adolescent reading. It is just as easy to plan a unit on the twenty-first century for the mature, accelerated Hamlet group using Future Shock (Alvin Toffler, Bantam) for common reading along with student's choice of such books as Stranger in a Strange Land (Robert Heinlein, Avon); Alas, Babylon (Pat Frank, Bantam); Pebble in the Sky (Isaac Asimov, Bantam); or 2001: A Space Odyssey (Arthur C. Clarke, Signet). Discussion and projects and papers about such books are certainly lively!

Another way paperback books are used in our schools is in some of our minicourse programs. A year or so ago one of the junior high schools initiated an eighth grade curriculum of

minicourses six weeks in length. Each eighth grader, advised by his parents, guidance counselor and English teacher, elected ten courses that he would like to take from the ones offered. Our friendly computer scheduled each student for six out of the ten choices. The end-of-year evaluation showed that students read more, wrote more, and really enjoyed their English minicourses. The books they lost, they replaced. The students rebelled against going back to a year-long course of English instruction with just one teacher. The English faculty got busy and wrote enough additional course descriptions so that the following year both eighth and ninth grades had minicourses!

One of our high schools has a minicourse program with courses one semester in length. Here again paperback books supplement the textbook or, in some courses, several paperbacks serve as textbooks. A visitor to these minicourse classrooms invariably comments on the expectant attitude of the students who, because they are "turned on" to the notion of short courses and relevant subject matter, have an attitude which can only be described as "expectant." The students come expecting to learn. What teacher would have the heart to disappoint them?

Certain courses in other high schools use paperback books exclusively. One of the most successful is the course in contemporary literature where free reading from a wide selection of really contemporary paperback titles is combined with regularly assigned journal writings.

A way of individualizing instruction in New Orleans is a system of paperback book stores which was instituted within the

last few years. The program of free reading described by Dr. Daniel Fader in Hooked on Books and the program of journal writing used along with it intrigued us. Because system-wide funding of Dr. Fader's individualized reading program was not possible, we set about looking for what was possible. Carpenters were hired by our paperback wholesaler to make sturdy wooden bookshelves hinged like a book which closed with a hasp and a combination lock. (The shelves hold four copies each of one hundred titles.) In this way access to the "book store" can be limited by the sponsor to those hours when the bookstore is open, and students are free to browse and buy. Before the bookstore is delivered to the school, the consultant gives to the book supplier a description of the school population, and the supplier -- with the consultant's help -- selects books which both feel would be appropriate. When the books are delivered, however, any which the sponsor deems unsuitable is never put on the shelves.

One of the most interesting bookstores was sponsored by a fourth grade teacher who was teaching her students how to make change. the students were salesmen whenever the bookstore was open. This behind-the-counter book salesman in an elementary school certainly would be literally representative of the bubble gum lit end of our continuum. The chances are that if he truly does become "hooked on books" in elementary school, he may very well have a successful academic career ahead of him. He very likely will move right along the continuum and end up with the Hamlet crowd at the far end before he changes his home from New Orleans to college and his cuisine from both bubble gum and Hamlet.

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Some Ways to Use Adolescent Literature - Grades 7 - 12

One of the ways in which adolescent paperback literature is used in New Orleans is in thematic units. The books listed are typical of the many excellent publications in the field but are only suggestions for possible use. The individual teacher will want to preview and pre-select books for particular classes, keeping in mind criteria such as:

What NOT to Read:

Classics merely because they are classics.
New books merely because they are new.
Any book in questionable taste (e.g., book containing explicit "gutter talk" or explicit sex).
Any book a teacher feels herself too inexperienced to cope with from a public pressure point.

What to Read:

Every title suggested to a student reader.
The book selected should be part of a developing program, not read without relevance to teacher goals.
The book should be appropriate to student's maturity level.
The book should be appropriate to student's ability level.
The book should be well written or have literary merit, though not necessarily "great literature."
(The teacher should ALWAYS avoid titles regularly taught on other grade levels as a matter of policy.)

Unit - Problems
+Ox: The Story of a Kid at the Top - John Ney - Bantam
Drop Out - Jeannette Eyerly - Berkley
The Outsiders - S. E. Hinton - Dell
Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack - M. E. Kerr - Dell
A Long Way Home From Troy - Donia Mills - Bantam
*The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds - Paul Zindel - Bantam
Escape from Nowhere - Jeannette Eyerly - Berkley
*Go Ask Alice - Anonymous - Avon

Unit - Black Studies
+Edgar Allan - John Neufeld - Signet
One Summer in Between - Melissa Mather - Avon
Harlem Summer - Mary Vroman - Berkley
Jazz Country - Nat Hentoff - Dell
The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou - Kristin Hunter - Avon
The Contender - Robert Lipsyte - Bantam
Satchmo - Louis Armstrong - Signet
Brown Girl, Brownstones - Paule Marshall - Avon

*Unit - "Special" Problems
Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones - Ann Head - Bantam
Phoebe - Patricia Dizenzo - McGrow Hill
+A Girl Like Me - Jeannette Eyerly - Berkley
Joy in the Morning - Betty Smith - Bantam
Bonnie Jo, Go Home - Jeannette Eyerly - Bantam

*Unit - Twenty-first Century, A.D.
Future Shock - Alvin Toffler - Bantam
Stranger in A Strange Land - Robert Heinlein - Avon
Alas, Babylon - Pat Frank - Bantam
Pebble in the Sky - Isaac Asimov - Bantam
2001: A Space Odyssey - Archer C. Clarke - Signet
We - Yevgeny Zamyatin - Bantam

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*Mature in viewpoint and/or high ability level
+Easy to read

C 14 Adolescent Literature
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